

1 Thessalonians 5:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.

Analysis

For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape— hotan legōsin, Eirēnē kai asphaleia, tote aiphnidios autois ephistatai olethros hōsper hē ōdin tē en gastri echousē, kai ou mē ekphygōsin (ὅταν λέγωσιν, Εἰρήνη καὶ ἀσφάλεια, τότε αἱφνίδιος αὐτοῖς ἐφίσταται ὀλεθρος ὥσπερ ἡ ὡδὶν τῇ ἐν γαστρὶ ἔχούσῃ, καὶ οὐ μὴ ἐκφύγωσιν). **Peace and safety** (eirēnē kai asphaleia, εἰρήνη καὶ ἀσφάλεια) describes false security—when the world feels safe, aiphnidios olethros (αἱφνίδιος ὀλεθρος, 'sudden destruction') strikes.

The birth-pang metaphor emphasizes inevitability and suddenness—as labor pains arrive unexpectedly yet certainly, so Christ's return. Jesus used similar imagery (Matt 24:8; Mark 13:8). Ou mē ekphygōsin (οὐ μὴ ἐκφύγωσιν, 'they shall not escape')—double negative for emphatic denial. No escape exists for those unprepared. This contrasts believers (who watch, vv. 4-8) with unbelievers (who say 'peace' while destruction approaches). The parallel to Noah's flood is striking: while mockers feasted, judgment came (Matt 24:37-39). False security blinds people to impending doom.

Historical Context

Pax Romana ('Roman Peace') dominated Paul's era—military might enforced stability, and Rome's propaganda proclaimed eternal security. Yet Paul warns:

worldly 'peace and safety' is illusion; sudden destruction will shatter false confidence. Throughout history, civilizations at their zenith collapse unexpectedly —Babylon, Persia, Rome, countless others. Contemporary Western prosperity fosters similar complacency: people assume stability while ignoring moral decay, rejecting God, and presuming immunity from judgment. Paul's warning remains urgent: crying 'peace' doesn't prevent destruction.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. What contemporary voices cry 'peace and safety' while ignoring spiritual realities and coming judgment?
2. How do you avoid false security based on present prosperity while maintaining biblical awareness of sudden destruction's possibility?
3. What does the inevitability of labor pains teach about Christ's return and God's judgment?

Interlinear Text

ὅταν γὰρ λέγωσιν Εἰρήνη καὶ ἀσφάλεια τότε
when For they shall say Peace and safety then
G3752 G1063 G3004 G1515 G2532 G803 G5119

αἱφνίδιος αὐτοῖς ἐφίσταται ὄλεθρος ὥσπερ ἡ ὡδὶν τῇ
sudden them cometh upon destruction as travail G3588
G160 G846 G2186 G3639 G5618 G5604 G3588

ἐν γαστρὶ ἔχούσῃ καὶ οὐ μὴ ἐκφύγωσιν
upon a woman with child and G2192 G3756 G3361 escape
G1722 G1064 G2532 G1628

Additional Cross-References

Hebrews 2:3 (Parallel theme): How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him;

Proverbs 29:1 (Parallel theme): He, that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.

2 Thessalonians 1:9 (Parallel theme): Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power;

2 Peter 2:4 (Parallel theme): For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment;

Jeremiah 4:31 (Parallel theme): For I have heard a voice as of a woman in travail, and the anguish as of her that bringeth forth her first child, the voice of the daughter of Zion, that bewaileth herself, that spreadeth her hands, saying, Woe is me now! for my soul is wearied because of murderers.

Isaiah 56:12 (Parallel theme): Come ye, say they, I will fetch wine, and we will fill ourselves with strong drink; and to morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant.

Psalms 48:6 (Parallel theme): Fear took hold upon them there, and pain, as of a woman in travail.

Jeremiah 6:24 (Parallel theme): We have heard the fame thereof: our hands wax feeble: anguish hath taken hold of us, and pain, as of a woman in travail.

Jeremiah 22:23 (Parallel theme): O inhabitant of Lebanon, that makest thy nest in the cedars, how gracious shalt thou be when pangs come upon thee, the pain as of a woman in travail!

Jeremiah 13:21 (Parallel theme): What wilt thou say when he shall punish thee? for thou hast taught them to be captains, and as chief over thee: shall not sorrows take thee, as a woman in travail?

From KJV Study • kjvstudy.org